RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT:

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON,

AT THE

OPENING OF ITS 100TH SESSION,

OCTOBER 6TH, 1885.

BY

JAMES DRUMMOND, LL.D.,

PRINCIPAL OF THE COLLEGE.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;

AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

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RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

THERE are two circumstances which give a special character to the occasion on which we are assembled. At the close of the Session on which we are entering to-day the College will have completed its first century, and it begins its hundredth year with a change of the first magnitude in the teaching arrangements. The venerable chief who, during nearly half the period of its existence, has laid upon it the stamp of his genius, has handed on his duties to men who, though not untried, are younger by a whole generation, and take upon them for the first time the full burden of their responsibility. And, believe me, that responsibility is very deeply felt. Even if we had ever been influenced by a taste for rash innovation, we are now past the age when it could seduce us by its charm, though we shall never, I trust, be too old to learn, or to adopt such modifications as may be necessary, amid surrounding changes, to adapt the College more perfectly to the principles upon which it is founded, and the aims which it has in view. And as regards the execution of our task, while we can only work with such abilities as have been bestowed upon us, our ideal at least can hardly be allowed to droop when we remember that this College has numbered among its teaching staff such men

as Dr. Barnes, John Dalton, Charles Wellbeloved, John Kenrick, F. W. Newman, J. G. Robberds, William Gaskell, Dr. G. Vance Smith, Russell Martineau, J. J. Tayler, Dr. Martineau, and others who might be mentioned, were not the list too long for a complete enumeration. Such names as these represent scientific, philosophical, scholarly and literary attainments, a noble conscientiousness, a loftiness of religious power, and a sweetness of spiritual character, of which any institution may be proud; and, if anything can be calculated at once to inspire and to humble us, it is the sacred memories that cluster around this home of faith and freedom, a home small and insignificant in the eyes of the world, but great in the integrity of its purpose and the purity of its consecration. It is our hope and our prayer that this inheritance which is committed to us may never be impaired by any pettiness in ourselves, but that through self-forgetting devotion to our work we may rise to the simple dignity of Christian service, and, though with less splendid gifts than some who have been before us, yet with no less fidelity of will, we may guard the interests which are for a time entrusted to us; and if the welfare of the College can be promoted by the co-operation of men who, while possessing very diverse aptitudes and tastes, are yet united in the most complete brotherly affection, then we may reasonably hope that the future will at least reflect some of the happiest lights and fairest tints of the past.

Although it has been necessary on more than one occasion in recent years to defend the fundamental principle on which our College rests against friendly misunderstanding or hostile attack, we cannot help reverting to the same subject for a few moments at this crisis in our history, when we naturally seek to bring together the

experiences of the past in order to shape from them our ideal for the time to come. It is not, however, my purpose at present to defend once more our principle of free teaching and free learning in Theology, but only to enunciate and explain it, and point out the fact that it was fully and deliberately adopted at the very inception of our undertaking. Nothing can be more unwarranted than the insinuation that it has been lately introduced into the management of the College; rather is it a novelty to hear of any opposition to it among those who ought to have inherited a more robust and manly faith. We are spiritually descended from men who knew how to suffer for holding unpopular convictions, and who believed that the truth of God could make its way most securely when it appealed with nothing but its own divine power to the reason and conscience of mankind. They saw that it was vain to drive in disciples with whips and hold them to Christianity by nets and fetters, and, in the humility born of their communion with God, they were too conscious of the fallibility of human judgments to set up their own conclusions as a standard to which all others must conform. How well do I myself remember listening, as a boy, to many an exhortation to allow no ecclesiastical barrier to be interposed between the soul and God, but to seek for truth fearlessly, honourably and humbly, in the certainty that we should surely find; and though, as I grew older, there was much in Unitarian preaching which seemed to me defective, yet this appeal, so generous, so trustful, so large in hope, commanded my full assent, and was a compensation for a failure, as I sometimes thought, to apprehend the darker aspects of human life, the horror of inward sinfulness, and the need of a divine transforming power, and a consequent externality in the way of regarding

Christ, his person and his mission. The characters nurtured in this freedom were, generally speaking, distinguished by a noble simplicity and devoutness, by a high ethical standard, and by a fine appreciation of human rights, and an aversion to intolerance and oppression; and room was left open for an expansive growth in whatever direction the Spirit of God might lead. Nor even at that time was this call to liberty a new watchword, but it had been handed down from older generations, who in fierce and troubled times won for us those sacred privileges which ought to be dearer to us than life. To go no farther back, I need only mention the truthful mind of Priestley pursuing its calm way through rational and scientific investigation, and, if we may cross to our kindred in America, Dr. Channing's noble assertion of the inalienable right of the human soul to commune for itself with the Spirit of Truth, and his summons to a life loftier and broader than any sectarian limits. Such men were leading the way towards something larger than ecclesiastical Christendom could offer, and had grasped the very principle of Paul's spiritual gospel—"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good;" "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" "Not the letter, but the spirit;" not knowledge, but love; not Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but Jesus Christ.

The men who founded our College in Manchester nearly a century ago were penetrated by these sentiments. The national seats of learning rested on that principle of exclusiveness which has been so disastrous to the religious history of England, and handed over to the grasp of faction the tattered shreds of Christ's seamless robe. Nonconformists were obliged to provide for their own interests, and to found academies where their youth might receive the education which was denied to them at Oxford and

Cambridge. Considering the weakness of human nature, nothing could have been more natural than to say, since others exclude us, let us exclude them; let us spend no money for the benefit of people of whose doctrines we disapprove, but let our College be purely denominational, and guarded from orthodox or heretical intrusion by appropriate tests. Many Nonconformist colleges, accordingly, have been founded on this basis, and are administered for avowedly sectarian ends. But it is nobler to reason thus: we complain of being excluded on account of honest differences of opinion; therefore let us never exclude on account of such differences: we are injured in being refused the full rights of citizenship; therefore, though we should never be recognised as part and parcel of the nation, let us prove that we are so by the width of our aims, by our public spirit, and by founding our College on a basis on which a national institution ought to rest: we are satisfied that in other quarters truth is impeded and the progress of mankind hampered by the principles of intolerance, and by chaining up in dogmatic bonds the energies of thought and the aspirations of the spirit; therefore we will have no such restrictions, but step forth from the narrow enclosures of party thought, and enter with awe and love into the infinite presence of the God of truth, and ask for no allegiance but to Him. Under the inspiration of this faith in realities which transcend the limited forms of human thought, our College was established, to provide a large and liberal culture for all who might choose to come. It was founded, to quote the original words, "on a plan affording a full and systematic course of education for divines, and preparatory instructions for the other learned professions, as well as for civil and commercial life;" and its free principle was expressed in these terms: "This institution will be opened

to young men of every religious denomination, from whom no test or confession of faith will be required." The rule thus laid down in the constitution of the Academy was commended in glowing terms by Dr. Barnes in his inaugural address, delivered on September 14, 1786. Permit me to quote a few of his expressions: "You have formed your institution upon the most liberal and generous basis, guarded by no jealous subscriptions, and open without suspicion or fear to all who wish to enjoy the advantages of science unfettered and free." And again: "Yours is not the cause of any party. You rank yourselves under no distinguishing name. The liberty which you claim for yourselves you extend with equal latitude to others. The burden to which you will not submit you will never impose. You plead for the equal, universal dominion of reason, of conscience, and of truth. To these great interests alone you consecrate this seminary. If these be promoted, your first, your highest hope will be accomplished." And once more: "You are creating a temple on the front of which you will inscribe no name of any distinguished human leader, either in science or theology. You will dedicate it 'to TRUTH, to LIBERTY, to RELIGION.'"

From the enlightened aim thus admirably expressed our College has never swerved. In all its migrations—to York, then back to Manchester, and finally to London—it has still desired a wider culture; amid all changes of thought and varieties of belief within its own circle it has trustfully rested in the words of Christ, "Seek and ye shall find;" and if it has had to lament the smallness of its numbers, and its practical limitation to the members of a single section of the Christian Church, it has been conscious that this was not due to the poverty of its own intentions, and its lack of popular approval has been richly compensated

by the breadth of its sympathies and the extent of its outlook over the universe of truth. Driven from the visible fold of the great churches of Christendom, it has not shut itself up in its own narrow confines, but entered into unseen communion with the saintly of every age, and gathered pearls of truth upon every shore; and while it stands fast in its integrity, and will make no dishonourable compromise for the sake of a larger fellowship, its secret life is not in a sect, but in the Kingdom of God, which stretches its broad empire over all sects, and comprehends many partial truths within the unity of its Spirit.

And now let us ask, What has been the influence of this position upon our teaching and learning? It has simply had the effect of placing the study of Theology upon the same basis as that of all other subjects of human knowledge. A Professor of Geology is not pledged to the inculcation of any particular theory, but is expected to set forth impartially the facts on which his science rests, and the leading theories which have been founded upon these facts, and then, in stating his own conclusions, to exhibit fairly the reasons by which they appear to be justified, and the objections by which they may be assailed. This method ensures a real grasp of his subject, both in its details and its generalisations, precision and clearness of statement, and accuracy, caution and candour, in the weighing of evidence. Similarly, the teachers of Theology in this College are not here to promote the interests of any particular school, but to lay, so far as they can, a sound basis of knowledge, both historical and psychological, on which the truths of Theology must rest; to describe with such impartial insight as is vouchsafed to them the great types of thought by which religious facts have been generalised and worked up into theological systems; and, in presenting

their own opinions, to define them with such clearness and support them by such a candid exhibition of the evidence, that if they be accepted they may be received by the convinced reason of the student, and if they be rejected it may be impossible to urge that any vital portion of the evidence has been concealed or misrepresented.

It is thus obvious that our unpledged position has no connection whatever with vagueuess and looseness of thought or indifference to theological doctrine. The effect of our whole method is to encourage exactness and thoroughness in the investigation of facts, precision of thought and definiteness of statement. The contrary impression in some minds must, I suppose, be produced by the circumstance that the College, as a corporate society, does not bind itself to any particular dogmas. But neither does University College pledge itself to particular theories in Political Economy, History or Literature; and yet it does not follow that the teaching of these subjects gives an uncertain sound or is enunciated without any intensity of conviction. It is precisely the indefiniteness of the corporate society that makes possible the sharp contour of individual thought. It is in freedom that the mind puts forth its entire force, and has none of the vagueness of compromise or of the misty air in which timidity loves to screen itself from attack. It is when we are chafing against dogmatic pledges which we secretly reject that we are reduced to loose generalities, and attempt to insinuate new truths in words which will not distinctly deny what we regard as ancient error.

Again, it is evident that the method which has been described stands in no particular relation to negative, or what is vulgarly called "advanced," thought. On the contrary, it offers the best security against reactionary nega-

tion, and opens the way for orderly progress towards higher and richer truth. It is a strange error which confounds freedom with contempt towards prevalent forms of faith, or shrieks in alarm that if only men be allowed to investigate Christianity without dogmatic restrictions they will certainly reject its claims; and those who convert this assumed result into a charge against the method of our College must, unawares to themselves, have lost their own faith in Christianity, and formed a very poor conception of the unsearchable riches of Christ. We venture to believe that truth will bear to be looked at, and that the more earnestly and impartially men study Christianity, the more will they realise it as a redeeming power in themselves, and the more will they find that the New Testament can not only sweeten their hearts and direct their lives, but ennoble their thought and widen the horizon of their spiritual contemplation. It is not that we may move along one narrow path of self-deceiving prejudice, barring the way behind us as we go—not that we may set up in place of the solemnly claimed infallibility of a great and venerable Church the insolent self-confidence of a petty and ignorant conceit—not that we may treat with disrespect or smart and shallow criticism forms of belief which we are unable to accept,—it is not for this that we value our freedom, but that we may enter more deeply into the life of God; that we may see with more searching glance the manifestations of his Spirit in human history, and gain a profounder interpretation of his revealing light; that we may come for ourselves closer to the central unity of truth, revising our immature judgments, casting off our old errors, seeking ever with listening ears for higher strains and a grander harmony, till the separate and imperfect notes of our individual and limited being are lost in the universal

anthem of the children of God. Not as teachers of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, not to bring another battle-cry into this striving, weary world, are we here, but to be servants of truth and messengers of peace, calling on our brethren to cease from their vain disputes and mutual recriminations, and enter with pure and child-like hearts into the life which is the light of men. Such is our ideal; but I say not that we have reached it.

But how does this affect you, my fellow-students and fellow-seekers after the deep things of the Spirit? Simply in this way—that by coming here you are not committed to any particular school of religious belief, but to earnest study, conscientious investigation, and respect for the serious convictions of those who differ from you. Small as your numbers are, you have been swayed in your earlier years by opposite theological influences, and you have brought hither varying tendencies of thought, and even standards of judgment which are not easily reconciled. This being the case, it is not surprising that there are among us differences of opinion upon important subjects, and we do not all share the same enthusiasms or insight into the same problems. What then? Shall we suppress by the hand of authority the expression of these differences, thereby aggravating the differences themselves, and mingling them with bitterness and a sense of injury; or shall we encourage their frank discussion, thereby bringing to a kindly test their strength and weakness, striking out new suggestions, finding mutual approximations, and each, through the larger intellectual life of all combined, advancing towards a more catholic view? The latter is the plan which has been always followed here, and, as I sincerely believe, with the happiest results. I do not mean that we have always reached a final agreement, or that views are

never retained which are in direct antagonism to the teaching of the class-room, and which may seem to the Professor superficial and one-sided; or that youths who have come to us full of self-confident desire to make a clean sweep of everything venerated in the past have left us calm and humble, with the mellow wisdom of a loving and reverent old age; but I do say that the perfect justice which we endeavour to accord to every phase of thought and character tends to soften away all the asperities of opposition and to create a deeper and larger life than would otherwise have arisen; and we are not ashamed of the men who, with no worldly advantage, are striving to maintain the principles of a liberal and holy faith in the maritime towns of the South, or amid the manufacturing industry of the Midlands and the North, or are spending heart and brain to alleviate the misery or to sweeten with a divine righteousness the sin of our great cities. To these I would say, Go on, dear brothers, in your blessed work, seeking only for a deeper humility and a higher consecration. What though we differ in many questions where men cannot all see alike? We sought not at the College to make you disciples of our own, but to help you to a more discerning interpretation of a greater Teacher; and if in rapt mood you can hear notes of that voice which we have never heard, we will rejoice and give thanks. But if some few of our *Alumni* have been unable, through intellectual difficulties or spiritual coldness, to enter the profession to which they once looked forward, we have parted with mutual respect, and they have retained, if I mistake not, a kindly feeling towards the religious faith which they found it impossible to accept. It appears, then, that experience has not proved what is theoretically wise to be practically foolish; and to you who have still to complete your course,

we leave, with unshaken confidence, the ancient freedom, with all its advantages, with all its responsibilities. You will be judged here by your character and mental qualities, and not by the particular shade of your theology. Only see that you render to others the respect which you claim, and try to make your freedom a reality by the breadth of your sympathies and the comprehensiveness of your principles. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Remember that a mind in bondage to its own prejudice and passion and antipathy is in a worse slavery than the Inquisition could impose; and only through escape from self into that Spirit of Sonship which unites us to the universal Reason, and brings us into communion with the Father whose children have worshipped in so many tongues, and have pictured the divine through such many-coloured thought, is true freedom to be found. And be not impatient if on many obscure and difficult points you are unable at present to reach independent conclusions. It is not necessary that immortal spirits should have mastered even one department of the universe before they have passed their twenty-fourth summer. You are now laying up materials for future thought, and in a few years the deepening experiences of life will make clear to all who wait upon truth with child-like docility many things which now come as dim surprises out of the cloud, and reveal no tangible form. To help you towards this ampler vision, intellectual and spiritual, is our privilege and delight; to feel that we have failed is our keenest pain. You know full well that it is our desire, not to rule you as masters, but to work with you as brothers; but this would be impossible unless you accepted with loyal and hearty allegiance the needed discipline, and reposed a generous confidence in our judgment. Without this relation, which

on the whole has so happily subsisted between us, our teaching would be futile, and your time would be better spent elsewhere.

We must now pass to a different order of reflection, and consider in what way our freedom has influenced our theological position. This is too large a subject to follow into its details, and we must be content with some general indications of the place which we have reached in the world of religious thought.

First, we must observe, that while our freedom has not precluded serious controversy, and a division, more or less marked at different times, between older and newer opinions, it has secured us against an arbitrary and unjust suppression of individual tendencies, and left the way open for advance without disruption. Consequently, whatever our movement may have been, it has not been governed by the violence of reaction, or fallen under the baleful rule of antipathy. It has been directed by the simple love of truth, and has been essentially positive and conservative in its character, its aim being not to attack error with iconoclastic zeal, but to reach higher truth and more comprehensive principles, and, wherever there seems to be error, not to be content with blank denial, but to reconstruct the ancient forms of thought so that they may at once be shaped agreeably to more recent knowledge and retain the old spiritual beauty and expressiveness. The result of this has been that, though we deliberately lay ourselves open to the whole influence of modern culture, our College has hitherto remained within Christian lines; and it is a significant fact that it has done so, not under the pressure of any external obligation, but simply because Christianity has, through its own intrinsic power and truth, commanded the veneration and assent of successive

teachers. I need hardly remark to my present audience that by Christianity I do not mean any one of the dogmatic forms in which it has been established. There are many both inside and outside the churches who maintain that it is ridiculous to call yourself a Christian if you reject any of the doctrines commonly known as orthodox. But if you once admit this plea, you must then decide which of the great dogmatic systems is Christian, and deny the name to either Catholicism or Protestantism. If you are not prepared for this, and, agreeably to usage, apply the common term Christian to such conflicting systems, then you must go farther, and allow the appellation to all who sincerely range themselves within the spiritual movement which derives its origin and its name from Jesus Christ. Our theories may be very imperfect, and many truths which we do not yet perceive may be involved in the Christian spirit; and for my part I believe that all our theories are imperfect, and that the spirit of Christ still rises in a solitary fulness of truth and beauty which worshipping disciples have but dimly apprehended. But granting our imperfection and our blindness, yet if our hearts glow with that life which we associate with the name of Christ, if our hope for the world lie, not in the destruction of Christianity, but in its purification and the more complete triumph of what we believe to be its fundamental principles, how can we be justly classified otherwise than as Christian? Not, however, that we need contend about a word so long as the reality cannot be taken from us; I only wish to indicate on which side of the dividing line we consider ourselves to be.

But while our attachment to Christianity remains unabated, it cannot be denied that our theological conception of it has undergone a profound modification. In what I

have to say upon this subject it must be understood that I speak simply for myself; for I am quite aware that the change in our position would not be described in the same terms by all the friends of our College.

It would have argued a strange and inexplicable stagnation if we still occupied the ground that was held by our predecessors a century ago. Seldom has the world of thought experienced such momentous changes within so short a period. Even the Catholic Church, which glories in its immobility, has promulgated new dogmas, and our own Established Church has had its Evangelical, its High-church and its Broad-church movements. Science has not only been accumulating detailed facts and extending the range of knowledge, but has reached an interpretation of the ascertained facts which has produced a revolution in our whole conception of the history of our planet, and affected almost every subject of study. At the same time history and philosophy have not been idle, but have opened out new avenues of thought, created new standards by which to judge of the past, and thrown the combining links of permanent laws around the whole cycle of human growth. The universe has changed to our view from a mechanism created by an external Agent, who normally left it to itself, but occasionally "interfered" in order to promote the highest interest of mankind, into an organism interpenetrated with one divine force which works by permanent methods, and slowly unfolds in time and space the contents of an eternal Thought. Into this view the old conception of Judaism and Christianity as special divine interpositions, breaking the continuity of progress and disturbing the action of established laws, will not easily fit; and the belief in an infallible Scripture which was associated with this conception has slowly crumbled away

uuder an investigation conducted by new methods and illuminated by new knowledge. The loss of this belief naturally caused many to reject Christianity altogether; for they had been taught that the infallibility of the Bible was the corner-stone of the entire system. Among ourselves, however, an intermediate position, which sought to preserve the authority while giving up the infallibility of Scripture, was for some time maintained, and the full gravity of the change was only realised by degrees. The Bible, it was said, "*is* not the word of God, but *contains* the word of God." But an authority in the sense intended, an authority which is to override the individual judgment, and speak to you as with the voice of God himself, must be infallible; for if you may pick and choose, and say, "This is the truth of God, and that is human error," then you must have some criterion which is higher than the very authority to which you appeal, and you can no longer accept a single statement, without regard to its intrinsic probability, on the sole ground that it has scriptural warrant. Our altered view of the Bible, therefore, must affect the foundations of our theology; and that it has not led us to discard Christianity is probably due to the slowness with which the change has come upon us, and our increasing tendency, which appeared before we were conscious of the extent of the change, to dwell upon the inward power and spiritual attractiveness of the Gospel rather than on the evidence which it supplied of dogmatic truth.

Let us endeavour to see more clearly the point of view which we have thus gained. Christianity has become to us less outward, and has entered more deeply into the heart of our spiritual life. Christ is no longer the divine "ambassador," who comes with physical marvels as his

"credentials," and delivers a message which can be fully apprehended by the ordinary methods of intellectual communication. Rather is he one who has enshrined in mortal flesh the divine Thought for humanity, and gathered up into a harmonised image, full of the most moving and pathetic expression, revelations which before were more scattered, partial and external. His message to us is not one of mere words and precepts, but the communication of a spirit, and is understood, not by the pathway of instruction, but through our consciousness of a new principle of life within. Christianity, then, considered as a power affecting our conduct, is not a rule, whether of word or example, which we observe from the outside and voluntarily obey, but a special form of spiritual life hidden in the recesses of the soul, out of which flow the actions which naturally express it. As we describe one man as ambitious, another as dishonourable, and a third as conscientious, and can distinguish, for instance, the spirit of Stoicism and the spirit of Epicureanism, so there is a type of character which we justly describe as Christian, because the inner forces of which it consists are those which we associate with the name of Christ and can best speak of as Christ's spirit. This spirit is too rich and complex to have its qualities summed up in any brief formula, but we may recognise it chiefly by a saintly and devoted love, which is conscious that it comes from God and goes to God, and is a fountain of divine power within us, cleansing away the selfishness of our mortal nature, and preparing us for the complete communion of the sons of God. Forth from this love spring our Christian duties, no longer the service of obedience to commandments which we receive upon authority, but a glad response to the pleadings of eternal righteousness, known and treasured in our hearts. Within the

spirit lie implicit truths, which must be drawn forth by the reason and wrought into the organism of knowledge, a process in which we may often go astray and have to retrace our steps, but where we dwell as intimate friends with the truth whose forms we cannot yet trace, and feel that vital power which is missed by so many who say "Amen" to creeds that never disclose their meaning in the soul.

It may be urged that this view of Christianity tends to make it too subjective, and to throw the individual too much upon the limited resources of his own nature; and it has sometimes appeared to me that we are in danger of falling into this error, and do not sufficiently discriminate the imperfect reason and conscience with which each is endowed, from the ideal or universal reason and conscience to which it is our aim to be conformed. The view, however, which I have endeavoured to set forth does not necessarily involve this one-sidedness, but, while rejecting the old claim to outward and formal infallibility, still preserves an objective standard in the Church and in Christ.

One of the most potent instruments of progress is intercourse with men of higher soul and larger thought than ourselves; and if the Church corresponded with its ideal, it would enshrine in its collective society a far more complete expression of Christ's spirit than could be seen in men taken one by one, and through our incorporation with it we should grow towards its universality, and find in it a constantly revealing medium of truths which we failed to detect in their original complex unity, but which have become plain by analysis, and by their separate and therefore more striking presentation. Now in spite of all its errors and sins, which have so terribly impaired its influence, the Church has not lost this function. When in place

of the old "Polemics," which were so well calculated to fence us more irredeemably in our own narrow peculiarities, we bestow a loving and sympathetic study upon the several types of Christian thought, and learn to recognise the prophet or the saint beneath a garb strangely unlike the costume of the nineteenth century, we shall begin to lay aside the veil of self-conceit, and to gain glimpses into long aisles and dim sanctuaries of truth, the very existence of which we had denied, and the hope will arise within us that with enlarged and purified vision we shall at last behold the spacious temple standing in the glorious symmetry of its heavenly design, with its various separate shrines each contributing to the effect of the whole, and with its spire ascending over all, and pointing to the infinitude of God.

But if the Church itself is liable to err, how shall we judge it save through our own consciousness of that spirit which it seeks to express? He that is spiritual and has the mind of Christ judges all things; and it is here that we have recourse to the New Testament, which brings us nearest to that mind, and, whatever decision criticism may finally pronounce on particular narratives, leaves on the humble disciple a distinct spiritual impression, and, when read in its large meaning, brings before him a realised life with God, in which the human is sanctified into the divine, and the divine is manifested through the human, and the power of a seeking, saving love is brought home to the longing heart. Thenceforward this ideal, which is more than an ideal, an ideal revealing itself through a human life and working itself out through historical conditions, dwells within us as a kind of objective conscience and criterion of spiritual truth, telling us what we are to be but are not yet, an earnest of our immortal inheritance as

children of God. It is thus that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and becomes, as it were, a part of our inward being, and not a mere teacher or example outside of us; and we ask no more, with cold scepticism, for credentials, but rest in silent and wondering thankfulness beneath that love which has found us.

Now, how does this hastily sketched view, which seems to me to retain the highest spiritual elements and the redeeming power of Christianity, stand related to the liberal thought of our time? It falls in at once with the theory of development, which has been familiar to cultivated theologians since the time of Lessing. It is no longer necessary to suppose that the divine is absent because the human with all its imperfections and limitations is present; and we can no longer say, here everything is natural and goes on by itself without God, there everything is supernatural and bears the marks of infallibility and perfection. Rather do we see through the whole religious history of mankind the working of a divine Thought, slowly unfolding itself amid the limiting conditions of finite nature, hemmed in by the darkness of ignorance and the deeper darkness of sin, which could not comprehend the light, and yet, dimly conscious of its nearness, struggled feebly towards it; and we perceive that it appealed to men through the beauty and terror of the outward scene, through the tender and devout sentiments of the heart, through the rebuke of conscience, through the voice of prophets driven to give articulate form to some special message, and through the Spirit in one in whom it dwelt as in a familiar home. Thus we are beginning to believe the primitive Christian teaching that God is above all, and through all, and in all, and that of Him, and to Him, and through Him, are all things, and that He turns even the stubbornness and unbelief

of men into instruments for the advance of his spiritual kingdom.

There is no time to follow in detail the influence of this larger conception upon the character of our faith and practice; but we may just refer to two points.

Our view of the so-called heathen religions has been relieved of a horror to which only our want of imagination made us insensible. The notion that the whole world outside of Christendom had been abandoned by God, and that his revelations were reserved for a small fraction of mankind, could not but fill the thoughtful mind with sad misgivings, and, even when not coupled with the doctrine of an eternal hell, awaken doubts as to the goodness of God. But as soon as we believe that no single thing has been made apart from divine Thought, that there is a light which lightens every man coming into the world, and that every nation has beheld more of this light than it has ever followed, then we can see that the heathen religions were stages in the education of mankind, and that, whether they were clearly conscious of it or not, a divine Love has been pleading with men through all their history, and a divine Grace has been working in their hearts. The progress has been slow, partly because that is the order of Providence, and partly because man must meet and accept his responsibility; and in all nations, and not least in Christian nations, multitudes have been unfaithful; and it is only through the tears, and toil, and self-sacrifice of those who love the light that we are rising by degrees out of our brutish nature, and becoming clothed in the spiritual beauty of the children of God. Thus Christianity is not a light which makes all the world seem hopelessly dark, but one which casts an interpreting ray into the dimmest superstitions and saddest errors of mankind; and for myself I

have found it a deep satisfaction to learn that the same Spirit has spoken in many tongues to people of every clime, and to detect beneath the strangest systems and the wildest misinterpretations of the Spirit's voice such a wonderful similarity of aspiration and of trust. Alas! the resemblance extends also in the other direction; for what superstitions could be more grovelling, what barbarity and immorality more sickening, than those which defile the pages of Christian history? Still we will believe that a brighter day is dawning on the world, and that through our doubts and denial, as well as through our faith and our love, God is leading us nearer to his kingdom and his righteousness.

Our regard for the Bible, too, is relieved of many perplexities, and our method of using it completely altered, as soon as we acknowledge that inspiration does not imply infallibility, and that Providence works through the slow methods of human development. The tones of the divine word, caught by men of earnest soul, were no less real because they were adapted to a particular age, and, mingling with the limitations of a human personality, were uttered under the conditions of time and country. The presence of an apparent legend, the outbreak of an imprecation, erroneous science and narrow or imperfect views of God, no longer disturb us. We find it to be pure gain that the Bible has ceased to be a collection of infallible little sentences, to be used as proof texts, as they were in the Unitarian controversy, and has become a religious literature in which the Divine appears through the many-coloured media of various minds, and the responsive struggle of a nation towards the spiritual monotheism of Christ is depicted in the moving scenes of a prolonged human tragedy. The appeal of prophet or apostle sways us no less when we interpret them in relation to their

history, and try to disentangle their grand and abiding principles from the temporary adjuncts which we may dismiss. And for my part I cannot see that the change in our view of the Bible affects the unique position which it must hold for Christians. It is not only that it takes the highest place among literatures which can on any hypothesis be compared to it, not only that it places on record a consciousness of God of extraordinary depth and persistence, but it represents the course of development within which we ourselves stand; it is the primary source of our knowledge of the religion which we profess; it is most nearly related to our own religious consciousness, and has laid on us a burden of spiritual debt which we owe to no other writings; and consequently it appeals to us with a thousand affecting memories and associations, and, while we read, an innumerable multitude appear to gather around us, who have drawn life from its words of wisdom, and power from its story of self-sacrificing love. The present diminished interest in it is due, I trust, not to spiritual decline, but to reaction against an erroneous doctrine, and the time is coming when we shall have no difficulty in devoutly surrendering ourselves to its holiest influences, while yet retaining our manly freedom of judgment, and exercising that spiritual discernment without which even the Bible would be only a deadening burden upon the heart.

It must be apparent from the foregoing sketch that he who undertakes to be a religious teacher at the present day cannot be too fully equipped with the resources of knowledge and of thought. Our College has always endeavoured to maintain a high standard of scholarship, and the necessity for this has increased rather than diminished, for the flood-gates of speculation have broken up, and the

minds of men are full of theories and guesses. Three years given to study and self-consecration are all too little to prepare a man for the solemn responsibility resting on a Christian minister, but, if conscientiously used, may at least introduce him into the forecourts of the temple of truth, and endow him with some measure of the humility, the caution, and the thoroughness of a genuine scholar. At no time were the Churches more in need of a calm and lofty wisdom, which can stand above the shifting currents of temporary thought, and rest amid the realities which abide and change not. It is only from the deep fountains of the Spirit within us that men can draw supplies of living water to refresh their thirsty souls; and this interior life, wherein we gaze upon the truth and love of God, cannot be secured without patient submission to daily duty, however irksome, and lonely hours of study and thought and prayer. The elementary sentiments of religion, when not formed by reason and directed by conscience, easily degenerate into fanaticism, superstition, or feeble commonplace; and the restless activity, too characteristic of the present day, which does not think truth worth the long and arduous toil needed for its discovery, or mistakes for truth the shadows of its own ignorance and prejudice, will accomplish no enduring work, and may do much mischief with the best intentions. I trust that this weak and shallow disposition will be far from all of us who labour here, that the years of preparation will be welcomed by each student as a golden opportunity, that none will fret at the interval which separates him from a work for which Jesus Christ was content to wait till manhood's early bloom was passed, and that we shall never feel any despair except that despair of self which is needed to bring us to the highest trust. To the pursuits, then, of

the Christian scholar and theologian, to the free teaching and free learning which ground their freedom in the simplicity of devotion to the Supreme Will, to the inward life of reason, conscience and love, and the outward service of beneficence and duty, to "plain living and high thinking," we once more dedicate our College.

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